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# "CUBA, NICARAGUA, UNIDAS VENCERÁN": *Official Collaborations between the Sandinista and Cuban Revolutions*

ABSTRACT: The Cuban and Sandinista Revolutions stand together as Latin America's two socialist revolutions achieved through guerrilla insurgency in the latter half of the twentieth century. But beyond studies that demonstrate that Cuba militarily trained and supported the Sandinistas before, during, and after their guerrilla phase, and observations that the two countries were connected by the bonds of socialist revolution, the nature of Cuba and Nicaragua's revolutionary relationship remains little explored. This article traces exchanges of people and expertise between each revolutionary state's Ministry of Foreign Relations and Ministry of Culture. It employs diplomatic and institutional archives, personal collections, and oral interviews to demonstrate the deep involvement of Cuban experts in building the Sandinista state. Yet, Cuban advice may have exacerbated tensions within Nicaragua. This article also shows that tensions marked the day-to-day realities of Cubans and Nicaraguans tasked with carrying out collaborations, revealing their layered and often contradictory nature. Illuminating high-level policy in terms of Cuban-Nicaraguan exchanges and how they unfolded on the ground contributes to new international histories of the Sandinista and Cuban revolutions by shifting away from North-South perspectives to focus instead on how the Sandinistas navigated collaboration with their most important regional ally.

KEYWORDS: Sandinista Revolution, Cuban Revolution, Nicaragua, international history, transnational history

From May 20 through May 22, 1983, a delegation from Nicaragua's Ministerio de Cultura (MINCULT, Ministry of Culture) visited Havana to meet with counterparts from Cuba's own MINCULT. The Nicaraguans arrived with several goals: to discuss a joint movie project, visit Cuban art schools, and introduce the Cuban office to the functionary responsible for MINCULT Nicaragua's international relations.[1] MINCULT Nicaragua also had an underlying motive: to systematize how they used Cuban advisors working with them, in order to "more intensely" take advantage of

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1. Informe sobre un viaje a la Habana, May 20–22, 1983, 1, Archivo General de la Nación, Managua, Nicaragua [hereafter AGN], Cultura, Box 5, Folder 12.

Cuban collaboration.[2] The Nicaraguan delegation hoped to tighten their ministry's connection to Cuba's MINCULT in expectation of future collaborations.

However, faux pas riddled the trip. When the Nicaraguans arrived in Havana, there was no one waiting to receive them, or even process their passports.[3] They considered this a "protocol failure," because the person meeting Nicaragua's vice minister of culture should have been Cuba's vice minister of culture. The breach upset the Nicaraguans all the more because of the importance the Cubans themselves placed on correct protocol. Following what the Nicaraguans perceived as the *bien fría* (very cold) and unenthusiastic reception, their delegation had to take a "beat-up" car to the hotel, where they waited 45 minutes for their rooms.[4] Over the course of the weekend, Cuban disorganization also resulted in the delegation's inability to visit the art schools, because the schools were closed on Saturday when they were scheduled to visit. The Nicaraguans returned to Managua critical and frustrated with the treatment they had received in Havana.

The Nicaraguans' trip and their ensuing complaints exemplify features of Cuban-Nicaraguan revolutionary collaboration during the 1980s. Cuban leaders had offered military, financial, and ideological support to the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN, Sandinista National Liberation Front) in its war to oust US-backed dictator Anastasio Somoza throughout the 1960s and 70s. With the Sandinista triumph on July 19, 1979, Cuba-Nicaragua relations expanded. The Nicaraguans solicited expertise and sought to leverage it for maximum benefit to their own revolutionary process. Cuban leaders sent advisors to Nicaragua to guide institutions such as the Ministry of Culture. Yet, when Nicaraguans travelled to Cuba, or came to stay there for extended periods, they encountered a revolutionary reality rife with contradictions. High-level ideals about Cuban-Nicaraguan collaboration unfolded differently on the ground, and the Nicaraguans' time in Cuba taught them that much of the Cuban experience could not be exported to Nicaragua.

This article considers Nicaraguan collaborators in Cuba and the role of Cuban civilian advisers in Nicaragua. It asks what forms Cuban advising took in Nicaragua, as well as how and why Nicaraguans and Cubans participated in state-orchestrated collaboration. By examining exchanges between each revolution's respective Ministry of Foreign Relations and Ministry of Culture, I

2. Informe sobre un viaje a la Habana, May 20–22, 1983, 2.
3. Informe sobre el viaje a la Habana, May 21, 1983, 1, AGN, Cultura, Box 5, Folder 12.
4. Informe sobre el viaje a la Habana, May 21, 1983, 2.

argue that Sandinista leaders modeled their revolution's organization after Cuba's and, with Cuban advice, employed similar strategies to consolidate their political control. Cuba sent thousands of professionals to reinforce this ideological paradigm. Thus, knowledge of revolutionary governance was transferred between revolutions via people and carried political significance embedded in each society's organization. Cubans and Nicaraguans served as vehicles of transmission, and their day-to-day exchanges produced tensions that textured both the revolution and revolutionary practices. Tracing Nicaraguan-Cuban collaboration shifts considerations of Nicaragua's international history away from US-Nicaragua perspectives to illuminate how the Sandinistas navigated revolutionary diplomacy with their most important regional ally.

Collaborations unfolded in volatile local contexts on both sides of the Caribbean. The Sandinistas offered Cuba a close political ally and a base to continue agitating for revolution across Central America. Moreover, a Sandinista demise would have been a blow to the Cuban Revolution's prestige and Cuba's regional defense. The Sandinistas took power at a moment of simultaneous tension and stagnation in Cuba. By the late 1970s, material shortages and the mundane reality of an institutionalized revolution confronted the average Cuban citizen. Reliance on Soviet subsidies kept the inefficient economy afloat, but an air of austerity prevailed. Unemployment soared: covert estimates ranged from 200,000 to 300,000 unemployed in 1980.[5] Commemorations of revolutionary events occurred frequently, designed by leaders to evoke a more exciting time and recount revolutionary gains, which no longer were evidenced in Cubans' everyday life.[6] The drab conditions that marked the beginning of the Cuban revolution's third decade intensified into mass discontent by March of that year. The Mariel Boatlift defined 1980; over the course of the year, 120,000 Cubans left for Florida through the port of Mariel. The Mariel crisis shook leadership's confidence in its hold on the Cuban public, and displayed widespread discontent with the reality of life and its material deficiencies after the monotonous 1970s.

Although Cuba supplied the experts, collaboration with Sandinista Nicaragua yielded mutual benefits. Cuban leaders turned to internationalist collaboration to strengthen revolutionary consciousness at home, employ citizens, stem social discontent, and ideally, radicalize the younger generation born too late for the early years of the Cuban revolution. British onlookers characterized the situation: "Mariel and internationalism . . . are but two sides of the same

5. Commentary, January 26, 1981, 7, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom [hereafter (TNA], FCO 99, Folder 707.

6. Michael Bustamante, "Anniversary Overload? Memory Fatigue at Cuba's Socialist Apex," in *The Revolution from Within: Cuba, 1959–1980*, Bustamante and Jennifer Lambe, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 218–234.

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coin."[7] That is, both strategies sought to answer Cuba's problems by turning to international solutions, rather than addressing the root causes within. After 1980, the Cuban Revolution's continuing victories would be won abroad, rather than at home.

In Nicaragua, the benefits of collaboration with Cuba were even clearer. With the help of Cuban collaborators, Sandinista leaders sought to adopt the Cuban model, to varying degrees, in order to consolidate their own revolutionary project. Both Nicaraguan and Cuban actors have emphasized that Fidel Castro instructed the Cuban collaborators to advise, but to always let their Nicaraguan counterparts make the decisions.[8] The Sandinistas sought to avoid the pitfalls of the Cuban revolution, such as reliance on Soviet subsidies, violent show trials, and the strangulation of the market. As the Sandinistas navigated a complex international arena, they often downplayed or covered up Cuban influence to make their project more palatable to Western democratic audiences. The Sandinistas relied on Cuban support, but their revolution embodied the hope that Cuban mistakes could be avoided or overcome.

Though top leaders crafted foreign policy and collaboration agreements, it was everyday Cubans and Nicaraguans—from bureaucrats to artists to students—who carried out these projects. Technocrats and specialists served as the middlemen of Cuban-Nicaraguan collaboration, and they played key, albeit understudied, roles in the broader Latin American Cold War.[9] This article, by centering their experiences, illuminates the human face of foreign policy and the grassroots experiences of the Cold War.[10] This approach conceptualizes the everyday interactions of collaboration as a prominent dimension of international relations. Further, the article builds on previous studies that assess the Cuba-Nicaragua relationship during the Sandinista Revolution's consolidation and governance phases to show how the Cuban revolution inspired and supported the Sandinista insurrection.[11] Cubans offered collaboration in terms of providing doctors and support for the Sandinistas'

7. Commentary, January 26, 1981, 7.

8. Interview with Fabián Escalante Font, in Luis Suárez Salazar and Dirk Kruijt, *La Revolución Cubana en nuestra América: el internacionalismo anónimo* (Havana: Ruth Casa Editorial, 2015), 475; Michael Vázquez Montes de Oca, interview by author, Havana, Cuba, December 16, 2017; Mateo Jarquín, "A Latin American Revolution: The Sandinistas, the Cold War, and Political Change in the Region, 1977–1990," (PhD diss.: Harvard University, 2019), 131.

9. Gilbert Joseph, "Border Crossings and the Remaking of Latin American Cold War Studies," *Cold War History* 19:1 (March 14, 2019): 141–142; Andra Chastain and Timothy Lorek, eds., *Itineraries of Expertise: Science, Technology, and the Environment in Latin America's Long Cold War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

10. Gilbert Joseph, "What We Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies, in *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War*, Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 3–46.

11. Matilde Zimmerman, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Victor Russell Figueroa Clark, "Chilean Internationalism and the Sandinista Revolution 1978–1988" (PhD diss.: London School of Economics, 2010); Gerardo Sánchez Nateras, "The Sandinista Revolution and the

Literacy Campaign and the Departamento América's (Cuban organization responsible for secret foreign relations and maintaining connections with Latin American revolutionary movements) activities in Nicaragua.[12] By shifting the perspective to institutional exchanges, I shed light on the understudied and chaotic period immediately following the Sandinista revolution's triumph and on the difficulties of building a revolutionary state.

This article presents another layer of the inter-American Cold War by tracing the deep involvement of Cuban experts in the Sandinista state. It analyzes how this relationship functioned to build institutions and state-level protocols and offers a new perspective on the everyday practice and process of revolutionary diplomacy. I use documents that Cuba's Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (MINREX, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Ministry of Culture have recently made available, along with Ernesto Cardenal's papers from the time he served as the Sandinista Minister of Culture. The opening of Cuba's MINREX archive has allowed scholars unprecedented access to the inner workings of Cuba's revolutionary foreign policy, but there remain gaping holes.[13] Nicaragua constitutes one: the collection is designated "open," but archivists have pulled files marked sensitive, secret, or derivative from the Communist Party. What is left is a small sample of what there must be. Similarly, Cuba's Ministry of Culture is in an ongoing project of processing documents, and has not made all files from the 1980s available. And in Nicaragua, renovations and political unrest have curtailed access to the Sandinista Ministry of Culture collection. This study therefore offers a new piece of the Cuba-Nicaragua relationship to which others will add as more documentation becomes available.

Even so, what is accessible allows for a detailed examination of governmental collaborations between Cuba and Nicaragua and many individual dimensions of their politics. This article first traces connections between Cuba and Nicaragua's Ministries of Foreign Affairs and shows how diplomatic expertise flowed from Cubans to their Nicaraguan counterparts. Cuban and Nicaraguan

Limits of the Cold War in Latin America: The Dilemma of Non-Intervention during the Nicaraguan Crisis, 1977–78," *Cold War History* 18:2 (2018), 111–129.

12. Political scientist Gary Prevost first questioned the relationship between Cuba and Nicaragua. He documented the origins of Cuban-Nicaraguan collaboration, detailed categories of Cuban aid to Nicaragua after 1979, and considered how the revolutions influenced each other. See Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?" *Latin American Perspectives* 17:3 (1990), 120–137; K. Cheasty Anderson, "Doctors within Borders: Cuban Medical Diplomacy to Sandinista Nicaragua, 1979–1990"; Valerie Miller, *Between Struggle and Hope: The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985); Dirk Kruijt, *Cuba and Revolutionary Latin America: An Oral History* (London: Zed Books, 2017); and Salazar and Kruijt, *La Revolución Cubana en nuestra América*.

13. Authors of new scholarship using the ACMINREX include Renata Keller, *Mexico's Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Aaron Coy Moulton, "Building Their Own Cold War in Their Own Backyard: The Transnational, International Conflicts in the Greater Caribbean Basin, 1944–1954," *Cold War History*, 15:2 (2015): 135–154; Jarquín, "A Latin American Revolution."

bureaucrats functioned as Cold War foot soldiers who were tasked by leaders to learn, plan, and organize foreign policy in service of both revolutions' continued endurance. The article then considers collaborations between the two Ministries of Culture and demonstrates how the Cuban government informed the Nicaraguan ministry's organization and sent artists and experts whose knowledge served political goals. Finally, the narrative shifts to Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast and considers the extent to which Cuban advisors guided Sandinista efforts to integrate the coastal region into the national revolution.[14] Throughout the article, I consider moments when collaboration efforts did not go according to plan, in order to illuminate the actions of the people directly tasked with carrying out or participating in such political projects. Like the Nicaraguan MINCULT trip that opened this article, these moments reveal day-to-day realities of exchange and tensions that arose from them. In turn, these tensions demonstrate the negotiated relationship between Cuba and Nicaragua's revolutionary states and how the Sandinistas maneuvered to shape it to their own ends—even though they were inspired by and indebted to the Cubans.

## DIPLOMACY AT HOME: CUBANS IN NICARAGUA

One significant contribution Cuban advisors made to Nicaragua's revolutionary state was to help it manage foreign relations. Within months after the Sandinista Revolution took power, a delegation headed by Pelegrín Torras, vice minister of Cuba's MINREX, traveled to Nicaragua. The delegation sought to ascertain how, and according to what standards, Nicaragua's MINREX was operating. In a meeting with Comandante Bayardo Arce, Torras reported that the delegation met with the Nicaraguan minister of foreign affairs, Miguel D'Escoto, and the vice minister, Jacinto Suárez. At the meeting, the Cubans insisted that knowing the Sandinistas' plan regarding foreign relations would allow them to provide more useful assistance. To Arce, Torras summarized Cuba's own initial revolutionary years, and reiterated the desire to know "how we can help you so that you do not have to go through the same conditions that we had to and [make] the same mistakes."[15]

Bayardo Arce raised several areas of concern regarding foreign relations. First, he admitted that the Nicaraguan officials being sent out in 1980 to engage in foreign relations "do not have the slightest idea what they are going to do, nor are they

14. The region is geographically on the Atlantic side of Nicaragua and today consists of the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACCN), and the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACCS).

15. Reunión celebrada en las oficinas de la Secretaria Ejecutiva del FSLN con el Comandante Bayardo Arce, February 6, 1980, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 2, Folder 1980.

prepared for it."[16] He referred to Nicaragua's need for guides and manuals to train its diplomats and institutionalize diplomatic education. The ambassadors were also working without much information about what was happening in Nicaragua itself, due to the lack of secure diplomatic correspondence, the issue of classified information, and a dysfunctional coding system. Moreover, Arce expressed concern that they did not know how to maneuver some aspects of diplomatic protocol and worried they were "insulting the various important people who visit."[17] The participants hoped that future collaboration agreements between the two ministries would address the problems Arce raised.

During this same Cuban MINREX visit to Nicaragua, María Dolores Matamoros, supervisor of Cuba's Office of Information Control, met with Sergio José Martínez, the MINREX Nicaragua official responsible for the Valija Diplomática (diplomatic pouch). She sought to understand in more detail the informational problems Arce referred to.[18] While she did not divulge Cuban solutions in the meeting, Matamoros questioned Martínez about how Nicaragua sent and received diplomatic cables, how documentation delivery and distribution were controlled, how archival documentation was processed, and who made photocopies.

Martínez explained that Nicaragua relied on standard locked suitcases, sent on regular airline flights. For example, in January 1980, MINREX Nicaragua sent 18 cases to the United States and received eight. When asked about the Nicaraguans' controls surrounding the documents and who delivered them, Martínez replied that they had such controls, but that the process was "not very scientific." He did, however, want Matamoros to know that he inspected the reports MINREX sent out daily. And, a bit flustered and perhaps sensing Matamoros's disapproval of his ministry's efforts, Martínez also wanted to explain that "we have only been working in this Ministry for one month; we were taken from other places to come carry out work here. When we arrived, we found this Department of the Valija Diplomática quite disorganized. There were no controls [on information, processes], nothing." Matamoros, with a touch of condescension, reassured him, "This is why we came, Sergio, to help you and the other *compañeros*."[19] Evidently, the process by which Nicaragua was handling diplomatic correspondence was barely functioning, insecure, and

16. Reunión celebrada en las oficinas de la Secretaria Ejecutiva del FSLN.

17. Reunión celebrada en las oficinas de la Secretaria Ejecutiva del FSLN, 2.

18. Reunión efectuada entre los compañeros Sergio José Martínez, encargado de la Valija Diplomática en el MINREX, y la compañera María Dolores Matamoros, Supervisora, Oficina Control de la Información, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 2, Folder 1980.

19. Reunión efectuada entre los compañeros Martínez y Matamoros, 1–2.

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delayed. Cuban advisors arrived to help improve the security and straighten out how to "correctly" correspond with embassies abroad.

Nicaraguans sought instruction on how to act appropriately for a revolutionary state and receive foreign delegations. In June 1981, by request of the Nicaraguan government, two Cuban officials from MINREX's Protocol department spent a month working with Nicaragua's Chief of Protocol of Foreign Affairs, Ramiro Contreras.[20] From the time of their arrival, the Protocol department consulted Ángel Reigosa and Alberto Méndez regarding every matter that came through the office. The Cuban advisors responded with suggestions for the director, who had little experience. Furthermore, the Protocol department was operating without intermediate managers, so that the director managed each case himself and the department thus ran behind schedule. Contreras solicited the two Cuban advisors to organize a course for the department on diplomatic ceremonies and how to attend to foreign delegations, as well as general aspects of organizing Protocol's duties. The course lasted 15 days and participants brought problems they faced to the meetings, to be answered by the Cuban advisors.

Additionally, Reigosa and Méndez helped organize aspects of the celebrations for the second anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution, which would take place in July. They guided their Nicaraguan counterparts in determining how heads of state would be received at the airport and carried out three practice runs. Each included "all of the necessary elements at the airport, including a band, as well as the participation of Protocol personnel, personal security, and the press."[21] They also advised on seating arrangements for the "two fundamental activities of the Anniversary," the formal gala and the Acto Central, which would take place in the Plaza of the Revolution. And, the two Cubans planned everything for the Cuban delegation that would arrive to participate in the celebrations: the airport welcome, accommodations, transportation, schedule, and a security detail.

Reigosa and Méndez were essentially Cuban bureaucrats who were experts in event planning, diplomatic protocol, and pageantry.[22] Nonetheless, this advising trip reveals the level to which the Cubans helped the Nicaraguans. If the Nicaraguans solicited help for planning their anniversary party, one can imagine that Cuban advising extended to many other areas as well. And instructing on subjects as dry

20. Ángel Reigosa and Alberto Méndez to Roberto Meléndez, July 30, 1981, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 2, Folder 1981.

21. Reigosa and Méndez to Meléndez, 2.

22. The fact that the present-day MINREX archivists have not removed the record of Reigosa and Méndez's trip from its folder means that the archivists did not consider this sensitive information. They deemed the instructions that these relatively low-level Cuban officials gave to their Nicaraguan counterparts on correct protocol unimportant enough for me to consult, after all.

as diplomatic protocol illustrates the politicization of even low-level statecraft and foreign policy. Contreras, the director of Protocol, was a doctor, not an administrator, and not at all well versed in the arts of diplomatic protocol. But just as Cuban leaders did in the 1960s, the Sandinistas privileged loyalty and revolutionary merit above pertinent skill when filling governmental positions. And to counter the lack of technical skill, the Sandinistas relied on the Cubans to help some of their unqualified leaders learn their positions. Finally, soliciting help in these areas shows that appearances were important, especially for young leaders and a young revolution. They cared about not looking unprepared or ineffectual under the spotlight.

Cuban technical assistance and advising to MINREX Nicaragua also took the form of information management. Cuba sent one staff member from its Office of Information Protection and Control for two months in 1983 to help MINREX Nicaragua implement an archival system and better manage documents.[23] Another person assisted the Nicaraguans in organizing their library and periodical records. According to a preliminary assessment trip, the Nicaraguan archival system was disorganized and followed minimal organizational systemization. Yet, even a year later, Cuban advisors found MINREX's archive operating on subpar standards. During the previous trip, the adviser had left an encoder for the archives, and the Cubans "had explained in detail" to the directors, department chiefs, analysts, and archivists across MINREX how to operate it.[24] They had also prepared an instruction manual on implementing standards of state secrecy. But on her arrival in May 1984, the Cuban archivist found that the Nicaraguans had made no progress and work had been paralyzed. She then returned to square one, teaching the manual to functionaries so that they would learn how to file and classify documents properly. And, toward the end of what should have been a 12-day trip, she extended her time to train the new head of the Division of Information Control, who, just starting out, "knew nothing in respect to State Secrecy."[25] By the time she left, the new boss and other members of the department were "properly trained" in matters of state secrecy.

On a higher level, a Cuban team made up of two officials from People's Power (Órganos Locales del Poder Popular, OLPP) and Leonel Urbino Pérez from the Departamento América of the Cuban Communist Party traveled to

23. Plan de trabajo del convenio de colaboración entre el Ministerio del Exterior de la República de Nicaragua y el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República de Cuba correspondiente a 1983, 3–4, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 3, Folder 1983.

24. Dulce María Pérez Verde to Antonio Bosque Abru, June 19, 1984, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 3, Folder 1984.

25. Pérez Verde to Bosque Abru, 2.

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Nicaragua from May 27 to June 3, 1983. Cuba's 1976 constitution initiated the People's Power system, which formed local municipal bodies across the island that in turn elected representatives to the national assembly of People's Power. Nicaraguan guerrilla commander Mónica Baltodano, minister of the Secretaría de Coordinación Regional (Regional Coordination Secretariat), invited Cuban officials involved with Poder Popular to visit her office. She solicited advice about how Cuban advisors might be able to collaborate on organizational and functional aspects of regionalization and administrative decentralization.[26] According to the report, the Junta de Gobernación y Reconstrucción Nacional (JGRN, Junta of the National Reconstruction Government) was drafting regional and local policies to improve regional discrepancies, support national integration, accomplish administrative decentralization, and achieve democratization of state management. It had created a Regional Coordination Secretariat in July 1982, and during the Cubans' visit proposed an amplified collaboration program. The Nicaraguans requested direct advising on how to implement local governance, akin to Cuba's Poder Popular. They wanted to revamp Managua's governing bodies and exchange information about how to organize on the local level. Moreover, they desired closer links between the Regional Coordination Secretariat and Cuban organizations in areas such as territorial reorganization and decentralization, economic direction, and regional planning.[27]

The number of top Sandinista leaders attending to the Cubans attested to their visitors' position within Cuba and the level of importance the Sandinistas placed on their presence and advising potential. By inviting designers, administrators, and leaders of Cuba's People's Power system, Sandinista leaders signaled their desire to adopt a similar system, or at least improve regional organization and local government systems. During their short visit, the Cubans participated in several official activities and traveled to regions across the country. They met and traveled with various leaders of the FSLN, including Daniel Ortega, Leticia Herrera, Henry Ruiz, Dora María Téllez, Sergio Ramírez, and William Ramírez, focusing discussions on Comités de Defensa Sandinista (CDS, Sandinista Defense Committees) and regional governance. The delegation went to León, Granada, Estelí, Puerto Cabezas, Bonanza, and the Miskitu communities of Sumbila and Kambla and also met with Cuban internationalists and workers along the way. It seemed to be a primary objective for the Cubans to understand how local iterations of Sandinista government did (or did not) function on the ground, in various settings and communities across Nicaragua.

26. Informe resumen de la visita efectuada a Nicaragua en el periodo comprendido del 27 de mayo al 3 de junio de 1983, June 14, 1983, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 3, Folder 1983.

27. Informe resumen de la visita efectuada a Nicaragua, 6.

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## DIPLOMACY ABROAD: NICARAGUANS IN CUBA

The official collaboration plan between MINREX Cuba and MINREX Nicaragua for 1979–80 addressed some of the technical issues raised in the meeting with Comandante Arce in 1979 and how Cuba proposed to help. For example, Article 3 stated that MINREX Cuba would "lend technical assistance for the production of organized, structural, and normative documentation. . . [as well as] the organization of the Foreign Service, consular training, and control of officials and personnel, and control and protection of information."[28] Thus, Cuba committed not only to technical advising, but also to diplomatic training. The Higher Institute of Foreign Service (ISSE, Instituto Superior del Servicio Exterior) of MINREX Cuba offered ten scholarships per year for a course specially designed for people whom MINREX Nicaragua wanted to be trained in foreign service.[29] Cuba also planned to send technical assistance to help the Nicaraguans to organize their own diplomatic academy—a concrete example of the ways in which Cuban organizational and technical knowledge was transferred to Nicaragua.

Cuban leaders proposed two course options for training Nicaraguan foreign relations officials in Havana.[30] One, an accelerated course of six months, would be for officials who were already part of MINREX Nicaragua and already (theoretically) had political and cultural preparation. Another two-year option would offer more extensive training. The design of these two courses implies that Cuban leaders were planning for both the short and long term: one prong addressed immediately operationalizing Nicaragua's foreign policy, while the other aimed to train cadres. Cuban strategists, expecting the Sandinista Revolution to last, believed they had the time and space for a two-year program, and committed resources toward Nicaragua's future. The first group of Nicaraguan officials selected to travel to Cuba for a short course included officials in charge of Nicaragua's relations with North America, Central America, socialist countries, and the Cuban and Panamanian embassies, as well as officials of the consular service, and the Office of Protocol.[31] The responsibilities to which they were assigned reflected Nicaragua's foreign relations priorities. For example, dedicating officials to both the Cuban and Panamanian embassies is striking and corresponded to those nations' importance to Nicaragua's foreign policy.

28. Plan de colaboración entre el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República de Cuba y el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República de Nicaragua, para 1979–1980, 1–2, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 2, Folder 1980.

29. Plan de colaboración, 2.

30. Resultados de las conversaciones sobre la formación de estudiantes, 1, February 11, 1980, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 2, Folder 1980. ISSE (Instituto Superior del Servicio Exterior ) became ISRI (Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales) in June 1981.

31. Resultados de las conversaciones sobre la formación de estudiantes, 2; Lista de compañeros que recibirán clases en la Habana, September 5, 1980, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 2, Folder 1980.

However, such training proved complicated in practice. The Nicaraguan students at ISSE caused the Cuban MINREX various problems that point to a dissonance between high-level policy and the realities of those policies. The Cuban government housed the scholarship students in a dorm-like building close to ISSE, which became a locus of conflict. The house apparently was not in good condition: the furniture was old, shower curtains were deteriorated (with no means for the Nicaraguans' hosts to immediately acquire new ones), and, at one point, the sewage clogged nearly to the point of having to relocate the students due to potential health concerns.[32]

Students also damaged the house on multiple occasions. One of these instances occurred in December 1985 and caused a "public scandal."[33] Around 2:00 am, some of the Nicaraguan students returned from a party drunk; six got into a fight, and in the scuffle they broke a window and chair. Police intervened to end the altercation, but when they tried to arrest Henry López Mendoza, the presumed instigator, his fellow Nicaraguans protected him and argued that everyone had been involved. Afterward, the Nicaraguan embassy in Havana took disciplinary measures and warned Nicaraguan students that if another fight or similar situation transpired, they would be sent back to Nicaragua. Drinking in the house was also prohibited.[34]

Issues arising around courses further evidenced discord in the foreign relations training project. In 1983, Cuban officials sent three Nicaraguans home due to their "low level of assimilation" and low aptitude to work as MINREX officials.[35] Such language reflects Cubans' presumed superiority as the "experts" in their relationship with Nicaraguans. Another student failed the course because of "*nervios*," which caused him to drink uncontrollably and miss class due to drunkenness.[36] The diplomacy training program Cuba ran for these selected Nicaraguans was a systematic effort to impart Marxist theory and a particular diplomatic strategy to rising Nicaraguan officials. The people in the program were supposed to be future Sandinista leaders and representatives, so the problems—and the lack of initiative on the part of the Nicaraguans—at first glance are surprising. Maybe some disagreed with the reality of Cuba's institutionalized Marxist revolution, and failing class was a means to cease

32. Nicolás Rodríguez to Ricardo Alarcón, May 17, 1984, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 3, Folder 1984.

33. Ángel Fernández-Rubio to Héctor Ayala Castro, December 16, 1985, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 3, Folder 1985.

34. Fernández-Rubio to Ayala Castro, 2; Olga Mirada to Lázaro Mora, December 25, 1985, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 3, Folder 1985.

35. Nelson Restano to Ricardo Alarcón, April 7, 1983, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 3, Folder 1983.

36. Eduardo Montoya to Lázaro Mora Secades, 1, April 20, 1985, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 4, Folder 1985. For broader discussion of nervousness and its relationship to political change and individual lives, see Jennifer Lambe, *Madhouse: Psychiatry and Politics in Cuban History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 198–230.

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participating in what might have been Nicaragua's future. The lack of desire to attend class by some suggests that they may have been sent to Cuba because of political connections and had no interest in the actual work. Or maybe Cuba was not what they envisioned it to be—reality differed too drastically from expectation. Nicaraguans studied Cuban ideology and political structure, but they also had to live in the Cuban system, day in and day out.[37]

Cuban advisors working in Nicaragua left the contradictions and challenges facing Cuba's own revolutionary government back home on the island. In Nicaragua, they offered guidance according to a model their Nicaraguan counterparts often did not experience firsthand. But as the discontented 1983 MINCULT delegation to Havana and the ISSE students indicated, when Nicaraguans encountered the reality of the Cuban Revolution, they protested the dissonance between theory and reality. Two instances involving the Nicaraguan ambassador to Cuba, Marco Antonio Valle, exposed the material shortages Cuban citizens faced and raised questions about Cuba as a revolutionary model. In 1982, two servers worked a dinner for the ambassador at his house.[38] After they completed service, they refused payment in cash and instead gave the ambassador a list of items they wanted him to acquire at the Diplomercado (a supermarket accessible only to foreign diplomats, stocked with goods and food unavailable to Cubans). Among other things, the list contained items such as oil and meat.

The functionary at Cuba's MINREX who dealt with the ambassador's complaint reported that the ambassador wondered "how, with a revolution like ours [Cuba's], is it possible that these men are charging in kind for their services?" The servers were leveraging *'socio-lismo'*—the use of networks and exchange to obtain goods in short supply.[39] In this case, the servers sought to use their relationship with the ambassador to trade their labor for goods from the Diplomercado; it is possible that they may have planned to resell the goods on the black market if they were working various diplomatic events and had regular access to such classic black-market items.

Valle wrote to MINREX for advice on how to deal with the situation, because the waiters had provided excellent service and he did not know where to find others with similar capabilities, but with "revolutionary" credentials for

37. For analysis on Nicaraguan students in Cuba in the 1980s, see Snyder, "Entangled Revolutions: Cuba, Nicaragua, and the United States in the Cold War Caribbean, 1979–1990" (PhD diss.: Yale University, 2021).

38. Conversación sostenida el 6-4-82 con el Embajador de Nicaragua, Marco Antonio Valle, sobre actividades de tipo social que él está organizando en su residencia, April 7 1982, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 2, Folder 1982.

39. Matthew Cherneski, "Sociolismo (Cuba)," in *Global Encyclopedia of Informality,* vol. 1, Alena Ledeneva, Anna Bailey, Sheelagh Barron, Costanza Curro, and Elizabeth Teague, eds. (London: University College of London [UCL] Press, 2018), 46.

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future events.[40] The Nicaraguan ambassador implied that other ambassadors and embassies were paying the waiters with the goods they requested, but that, he, unlike others, had felt compelled to report such "counterrevolutionary" behavior. Informal markets were not supposed to exist under a functioning socialist society, and waiters were not supposed to be paid in basic goods. The incident put Cuba's material scarcity on display for the representative of the very revolutionary state for which Cuba was functioning as the example, model, and ironically, material supplier.

Valle experienced other material shortages in a very intimate way in 1986. Upon landing in Havana on return from Guyana, he went into the airport bathroom, only to find no toilet paper.[41] He sent the Protocol attaché, Oscar Quintela, to find some. Quintela approached Ramón Vázquez, the "gastronomic manager" on duty in the airport (it is unclear if this is a euphemism for bathroom attendant, or if he occupied a higher position). Vázquez replied that there was no toilet paper, but that "the ambassador could wipe his ass with newspaper." Quintela repeated that the ambassador needed toilet paper, and Vázquez repeated his response.

The airport chief wrote to MINREX about this incident for three reasons. First, MINREX required notification because the ambassador had threatened to file a report about what happened (which would get back to MINREX anyway). Second, another job needed to be found for Vázquez, who lacked the "capacity" to perform his current duties. The third reason was to ask for help from the ministry in order "to take drastic measures in order to avoid worse damages [in the future]." This probably meant securing toilet paper for important people who came through the airport—something only the government might be able to arrange. Or, it may have meant enacting measures to maintain a reliable toilet paper supply, given that even if toilet paper was delivered to the airport, employees were likely to pilfer it and sell it on the black market.[42] The incident evidences the access ambassadors regularly had to products unavailable to ordinary Cubans. Vázquez's crass response is also striking, and is likely the reason that he appears in the archive at all. Was he tired of certain people expecting special treatment, when Cubans themselves resolved material scarcities day in and day out? The exchange raises questions around scarcity, the black market, and power dynamics. In this case, a bathroom attendant instigated a diplomatic wrinkle: his attitude was anything but "revolutionary"—but yet reflected "revolutionary" reality.

40. Conversación sostenida el 6-4-82 con el Embajador de Nicaragua, 2.

41. Rolando Conde to Roberto Meléndez, July 3, 1986, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 4, Folder 1986.

42. Toilet paper had been a hot black-market item since the early days of the revolution. See Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 179, 209.

Valle's dealings with the waiters at the embassy and the bathroom attendant at the airport confirm the lack of basic goods in Cuba during the island's high point of prosperity. In light of the severe material shortages during the Special Period in the 1990s, the 1980s are remembered as the "era of the fat cows" because Cuba was then flush with Soviet oil and support. In the early 1980s, Cuban leaders had implemented modest market-oriented economic reforms to address citizens' material needs.[43] While these efforts increased access to fresh food and some consumer goods, other items were difficult to obtain, due to both scarcity and inconsistent access. These included clothes, appliances, foodstuffs, and personal products. Processes such as socio-lismo that are now associated with the Special Period were embedded in the Cuban economy well before then, as citizens cultivated relationships and dedicated significant amounts of time to "resolving" material shortages.

Valle's complaints capture the contradiction between the support the Cuban government poured into Nicaragua and its cost at home. Cuban assistance to Nicaragua unfolded while Cuban troops fought in Angola (1975–91) and Ethiopia (1977–89); Cuban technicians worked in countries worldwide. Unlike other recipients, Nicaragua did not pay Cuba for the materials, transportation costs, or training received. In 1988, Cuba revised Nicaragua's economic package to include an improved exchange rate whereby Nicaragua received $2 USD worth of Cuban imports for every dollar of exports.[44] It also continued through 1990 a free gift of 90,000 tons of gasoline, siphoned from Cuba's own Soviet supply. Among other allowances for food, technical assistance, materials, and debt forgiveness, Ortega estimated the package's value at $150 million USD, over three years.[45] The Cubans' profits from other collaboration agreements with partners such as Angola and Libya likely funded the hard-currency cost of Nicaragua's package. But instead of using that money for material imports for their own country, Cuban leaders prioritized internationalism, and particularly assistance to Nicaragua.

## CRAFTING REVOLUTIONARY CULTURE AS WEAPON AND CRUCIBLE

Unsurprisingly, given the close relationship between Cuba and Nicaragua after 1979, the Sandinista Ministry of Culture, and the role of culture within

43. In February 1980, planners implemented the parallel market, which included farmers' markets and state stores stocked with foodstuffs and goods available in limited quantities and at higher prices. Alexis Baldacci, "Consumer Culture and Everyday Life in Revolutionary Cuba, 1971–1986" (PhD diss.: University of Florida, 2018), 314–330.

44. Vázquez Montes de Oca interview by author, December 16, 2017.

45. Denise Mary Holt, President Ortega's Visit to Cuba: 27–30 June 1988, 1–2, TNA, FCO 99, Folder 2759.

Nicaraguan revolutionary society, also bore marks of Cuban influence. Culture and the arts conferred political importance in Cuba, because of their revolutionary potential and their ability to be used to critique the state.[46] By the 1980s, the institutionalized Cuban Revolution supported cultural initiatives in literature, music, dance, film, and art as a strategy to spur societal transformation.[47] Cuban leaders sought to construct a hegemonic revolutionary culture that promoted their political ideology and educated the masses toward appropriate revolutionary consciousness. Moreover, cultural unity facilitated unity against foreign intervention and thereby promoted the revolution's longevity.

Like their Cuban counterparts, the Sandinistas prioritized creating a revolutionary culture. They had specified "revolution in culture and education" as a pillar of their political program in 1969. Under this thematic umbrella, they proposed that "the Sandinista people's revolution . . . will develop the national culture and will root out the neocolonial penetration in our culture."[48] Government support of intellectuals and its "rescue" of their works from the neglect of "anti-people's regimes" would provide the basis of the new culture. True to its plan, the FSLN wasted little time in launching its cultural program and formed the Ministry of Culture in July 1979, almost immediately after seizing power. Fr. Ernesto Cardenal, a poet, priest, and liberation theology activist, was appointed minister.

Over the course of its first year, the ministry more clearly articulated the role of culture within the Sandinistas' revolutionary project. Culture served as a voice for and defense of the revolution by galvanizing the masses to organize against social problems such as hunger, housing, health, and illiteracy. Revolutionary culture would also be simultaneously anticolonial and democratic. Therefore, the newly minted Ministry of Culture prioritized "reviving" a dormant Nicaraguan culture that was free from a past marked by Spanish colonialism, US intervention, and dictatorship. It was the duty of the revolutionary nation-state to "pick up and shake off the spiderwebs and dust from this great movement that should be our culture."[49]

46. Michael J. Bustamante, "Cultural Politics and Political Cultures of the Cuban Revolution: New Directions in Scholarship," *Cuban Studies* 47 (2019): 5.

47. Institutionalization occurred over the course of the 1970s. It included joining the Soviet trade bloc, which meant embracing material incentives over moral ones and relying on subsidies to fuel the economy. Leaders overhauled legal, judicial, and party structures; these efforts culminated in a new constitution in 1976. See Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the 1970s: Pragmatism and Institutionalization* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978); and Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 121–152.

48. "The Historic Program of the FSLN," in Bruce Mars, ed., *Sandinistas Speak: Speeches, Writings, and Interviews with Leaders of Nicaragua's Revolution* (New York and London: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 17–18.

49. Centros Populares de Cultura, 1, Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica, Managua, Nicaragua [hereafter IHNCA], Ernesto Cardenal Collection, Box 1, Folder 15.

Accordingly, cultural direction emanated from above. Culture, directed by Cardenal's ministry, would be a "vehicle of knowledge" that served to "elevate the people's consciousness" through education regarding society's political, social, and economic dynamics.[50] State-created propaganda, then, operated to organize and politicize the people. It was intended to inspire the masses to revolutionary action, such as voluntary labor and attendance at party events. The ministry argued that cultural workers and artists carried the responsibility to transmit the revolution's achievements, goals, obstacles faced, and plans to overcome them to the rest of society.

Projecting a vision of revolutionary culture was one thing, but implementing it quite another. The first months of MINCULT's existence were disorganized. The ministry lacked a central committee and clear "direction from the revolutionary leadership about how to carry out the cultural plan."[51] Different factions of the FSLN disagreed about what role MINCULT should assume and how it should operate.[52] Interdepartmental fights created "explosive conflictive situations" that resulted in the need to separate leaders in charge of the Teatro Popular Rubén Darío, the Departamento de Centros Populares de Cultura, the Departamento y Escuela de Artes Plásticas, and the Departamento de Danzas y Teatro.[53] Furthermore, a lack of specialists, combined with the heterogeneous nature of administrative personnel—artists and international collaborators—resulted in the first three months being awash "in anarchy, where everyone resolved their own problems in the manner they saw fit."[54]

Cuban expertise offered a solution to the struggling Ministry of Culture. Ernesto Cardenal travelled to the island at the beginning of October 1979.[55] The vice minister of culture, Daisy Zamora, followed in December and formalized collaboration between the two ministries. According to the Cuban report of Zamora's visit, a tone of "absolute faith in Cuba" prevailed.[56] Zamora also emphasized Nicaragua's receptivity to Cuba's suggestions to improve the ministry's organizational structure. These two visits introduced Nicaraguan

50. Centros Populares de Cultura, 1.

51. Organización Cultural de Nicaragua, 2, IHNCA, Cardenal Collection, Box 1, Folder 1. This document appears authorless, but likely represents the perspective of Ernesto Cardenal.

52. During all but the last year of the insurrection phase, the FSLN was made up of three factions, each holding different ideologies and espousing different revolutionary strategies. The Prolonged People's War (Guerra Popular Prolongada) subscribed to *foco* theory, which held the mountains as the primary area of struggle. The Proletarian Tendency, comprised of doctrinal Marxists, held that organizing urban workers would eventually lead to a dictatorship of the proletariat. Finally, the Terceristas promoted mass mobilization and alliance with the bourgeoisie. Under Fidel Castro's purview, the factions united in February 1979 and created a nine-person directorate, with three representatives from each faction.

53. Organización Cultural de Nicaragua, 3.

54. Organización Cultural de Nicaragua, 2.

55. Ernesto Cardenal to Armando Hart, October 12, 1979, IHNCA, Cardenal Collection, Box 1, Folder 24.

56. Juan González to José A. Orta, January 22, 1980, 1, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 2, Folder 1980.

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cultural leaders to the inner workings of the Cuban system and offered them their first opportunities to meet with Cuban cultural experts.

During her December 1979 visit, Zamora signed an official collaboration program for 1980. Collaboration fell under four main categories: organizational advising, artistic instruction, visual arts, and theater and dance. It stipulated that the adviser of the Cuban MINCULT, Botalín Pampín, would go to Nicaragua at least twice a year, along with administrative technicians and "specialists," or directors, from the offices of Cultural Welfare, Cubartista, and Patrimony.[57] Nicaragua requested scholarships for students to study dance in Cuba, and a group of professors from the National Ballet planned to go to Nicaragua to select candidates. Cuba also agreed to send specialists in photography and industrial design. This *convenio* initiated what would become an extensive program of cultural collaboration between Cuba and Nicaragua in subsequent years. It also emphasized the extent to which MINCULT Nicaragua was a bureaucratic mess and looked to Cuba for assistance, and showed that this help on the ground materialized in the form of organizational expertise, as well as the presence of literal experts in the arts.

Cardenal and Zamora's trips to Cuba led to reorganization of Nicaragua's MINCULT, beginning in January 1980.[58] Over the course of the year, the ministry created Centros Populares de Cultura (CPC, People's Cultural Centers), a national project that organized cultural services and mechanisms to promote popular participation in cultural activities such as poetry workshops, music and sports events, and film screenings. MINCULT formed the Asociación Sandinista de Trabajadores de Cultura (ASTC, Association of Sandinista Cultural Workers), which distributed cultural workers across Nicaragua. It also established the Consejo Popular de Cultura (People's Cultural Council), a national organization headed by the Minister of Culture, which was in charge of coordinating, supporting, and implementing the political culture of the revolutionary government. MINCULT strove to tighten connections to mass organizations by inviting each organization to send a national "cultural delegate" to sit on the council.[59] The council thus acted as a

57. Juan González to José A. Orta, 2–3.

58. Organización Cultural de Nicaragua, 6.

59. Mass organizations involved included the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC, Rural Workers Association), Juventud Sandinista (JS, Sandinista Youth), Central Sandinista de Trabajadores (CST, Sandinista Workers Federation), Comités de Defensa Sandinista (CDS, Sandinista Defense Committees), Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza, (AMNLAE, Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women), and the Ejercito Popular Sandinista (EPS, Sandinista People's Army).

vector that MINCULT could use to diffuse cultural programing, priorities, and politics to the broader society.[60]

The council oversaw the cultural centers in each regional department and managed the local Casas de Cultura (cultural centers). MINCULT Nicaragua directly modeled these sites on the Cuban Casas de Cultura, which were created in 1978.[61] Casas de Cultura were formed in neighborhoods and department capitals. Each Casa operated under the direction of a board that was made up of "culture" and "sports" delegates sent from the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, factories, and schools located in the Casa's zone.[62] Leaders positioned the Casas to serve as local political-cultural institutions that would transform culture into a revolutionary weapon and facilitate revolutionary consolidation.

Cultural collaboration had flourished into an expansive exchange program by 1985. The collaboration draft for that year spanned 21 pages and over 100 articles that detailed how various Cubans and Nicaraguans would travel back and forth to participate in learning, advising, and sporting opportunities.[63] Collaborators organized their work under several primary categories: the sciences, higher education, education, culture, radio and television, the Casa de las Américas, and INDER (Instituto Nacional de Deportes, Educación Física y Recreación). For example, Nicaragua would send three or four specialists for basic software or systems training, and Cuba would send some automated systems specialists to Nicaragua to give courses. Nicaragua would send one person to Cuba to learn to plan television shows; Cuba would send a makeup specialist to teach a 45-day course.[64] Cuba sent Nicaragua teams and players from more than 15 sports and other kinds of competitions, including table tennis, basketball, baseball, track, volleyball, judo, soccer, synchronized swimming, boxing, and chess. The cooperation agreement simultaneously illustrates the sheer number of people involved in a wide range of operations, and the level of detail and breadth of the tasks Cuba assisted with. It also shows that collaboration relied on professionals, as Cubans were selected for the skills they possessed that could be taught to Nicaraguan counterparts.

Authorities planned for a variety of subject-matter specialists and professors to continue receiving and giving classes, as well as to collaborate in research and

60. Organización Cultural de Nicaragua, 8; Centros Populares de Cultura: instrumentos culturales de las mases, 4, IHNCA, Cardenal Collection, Box 1, Folder 15.

61. Resolución 8/78 del Ministerio de Cultura de Cuba, AGN, Collection Cultura, Box 5, Folder 12.

62. Centros Populares de Cultura, 3.

63. Protocolo de Colaboración Cultural entre la República de Cuba y la República de Nicaragua, ACMINREX, Nicaragua, Box 3, Folder 1985.

64. Protocolo de Colaboración Cultural, 11.

pedagogy.[65] Educational exchanges had represented a main pillar of collaboration since the planning and execution of the Literacy Crusade in 1980. In addition to the Cuban teachers who went to Nicaragua to teach literacy, professors and educational specialists advised on pedagogy and subject content. For instance, in the 1985 collaboration draft, both parties agreed to exchange scientific and technical information among academic institutions and specialists in the areas of mathematics, physics, and information systems.

The collaboration was an ongoing process. The experience of one educational specialist from Matanzas illuminates what "exchanging information" or "establishing collaboration" entailed on the ground.[66] Ligio Barrera Kohli went to Nicaragua for one month in 1981 as part of a Cuban Ministry of Education team. The team was sent to write a diagnostic report about the current state of pedagogy for different subjects, from primary school through pre-university, and to make recommendations for improvement and for what should be taught in Nicaraguan schools. Barrera Kohli specialized in math and physics, a woman from Holguín specialized in English, a man from Camagüey in history and social sciences, a woman from Villa Clara in Spanish, a man from Cienfuegos in history, and a woman from Havana in chemistry.

Upon arrival, the Cuban mission assigned its team to an office in Managua, but they petitioned to travel around the country in order to see how schools and curriculum operated firsthand. A team of four Nicaraguans accompanied and assisted the Cuban team, and according to Barrera Kohli he and the other members of the team were "well taken care of." Many of the schools were still run privately, or by religious orders. He reported also that the well-stocked classrooms and labs the Cubans visited surprised him, because he had thought that Nicaragua's solicitations for help equated to material shortage. Barrera Kohli remembers being generally warmly received by locals. But in some places, he was advised (presumably by the Nicaraguan guides) not to say he was Cuban, "because for some, we had a reputation for being communists, that perhaps we Cubans would bring messages of atheism, against religion." Barrera Kohli insisted that the Cuban mission instructed them "to the contrary," that they "were to co-exist perfectly with everyone over there and to get along." People with religious beliefs were to be treated normally, because the Cubans "went in the spirit of collaboration, of coexistence, mutual existence."[67]

65. Protocolo de Colaboración Cultural, 4–6.
66. Ligio Barrera Kohli, interview with author, October 15, 2018, Matanzas, Cuba.
67. Barrera Kohli, interview with author.

FIGURE 1
Cuban and Nicaraguan Research Team

Source: From the personal collection of Ligio Barrera Kohli, who is second from left.

Nicaragua solicited help and Cuban expertise, probably in part because they knew Cuba would respond. Barrera Kohli's surprise at the lab equipment in Nicaraguan schools—and the fact that he commented on it more than 30 years later—speaks to the lack of materials in Cuban classrooms in the 1980s, and in this case, to Nicaragua's material superiority. On the ground, international collaborations predicated on Nicaraguan dependence and presumed lower status in the collaboration hierarchy was sometimes upended. Barrera Kohli's trip also evidences space for discussion and exchange between Cuban and Nicaraguan experts, and demonstrates that although he was sent to offer his own pedagogical expertise, he "didn't go just to bring my experience to them, but also to learn." As an example of this two-way street, he said that he liked the way the Nicaraguans taught trigonometry better, and so he and the others set up an exchange to consider adopting Nicaragua's trigonometry teaching methods in Cuba. Finally, his memories about having to play down his Cuban identity and push back against fears of communism and possible anti-religious bias speak to underlying tensions about the Cuban presence.

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The Ministry of Culture also facilitated artistic exchanges to teach and train Nicaraguans. In 1981, Cuba planned to send at least one specialist and one artistic director for theater.[68] It designated two teachers in folkloric and contemporary dance, two in modern dance, and one choreographer to assist the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional. MINCULT projected that all of these specialists and teachers would spend a year in Nicaragua. In 1985, MINCULT planned to send a range of people to teach music and the staging of musical performances, including a percussion teacher; a sound technician to teach Nicaraguan technicians how to properly produce performances by the musical groups Cuba would send; a person to advise on the repair, maintenance, and installation of camera equipment; a specialist to assist Nicaraguan counterparts in their cultural publications; and a lighting technician to instruct how to mount and work the lights for shows.[69] By soliciting particular skills from collaborators, revolutionary leaders politicized knowledge: cameras, lighting, and music itself made cultural production possible. The Sandinistas sought both to gain popular support and to transmit a particular revolutionary ideology by supporting artistic or sporting opportunities, cultural events, and various forms of entertainment.

Cuban organization and advisors informed the Nicaraguan Ministry of Culture, which used the Cubans' as both resource and template. Collaboration agreements facilitated the transfer of Cuban expertise to Nicaragua, with top officials exchanging information and strategizing together, and more ordinary people whose skills were sought traveling between Cuba and Nicaragua; they might also be tapped to learn said skills. Ultimately, Cuba posited that artistic expression could create a specific revolutionary culture, and it offered Nicaragua its experts to train them how to win hearts and minds for the Sandinista revolution.

## NICARAGUA'S CARIBBEAN COAST AND THE LIMITS OF REVOLUTIONARY COLLABORATION

Sandinista leaders employed culture as a strategy to unify Nicaragua's various cultural zones and build one "national, Sandinista, and revolutionary consciousness."[70] The Caribbean Coast featured as the prime target leaders designated for cultural integration, which, theoretically, would lead to political

68. Caridad Chao to Lupe Veliz, May 27, 1980, Biblioteca Juan Marinello, Archivo General del Ministerio de Cultura, Havana, Cuba [hereafter BJM-AGMC], Folder: Convenios y Protocolos 1980–1982.

69. Proyecto 1985, BJ-AGMC Folder: Convenio Nicaragua 1985–86, BJM-AGMC.

70. De Ministerio de Cultura de Nicaragua, Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional, IHNCA, Cardenal Collection, Box 1, Folder 40.

integration. The Nicaraguan nation's historical relationship with the Coast produced tensions that resurfaced with the Sandinista's nationalist revolution. Nineteenth-century elites had consolidated the nation's racial differences through mestizaje and in opposition to Black and Indigenous populations on the Caribbean Coast.[71] Sandinismo—the FSLN's revolutionary ideology—reiterated nineteenth-century narratives of mestizaje as a path to revolutionary consolidation. It continued to exclude Black and Afro-descendant-Indigenous people as revolutionaries through its ethos that mestizo peasants, descended from Indigenous populations that resisted Spanish colonialism, were the foundational twentieth-century revolutionaries.[72] This discourse left little room for racial and ethnic claims within the revolution.

The Cuban model required political and cultural unity: anything less left the island vulnerable to imperialist intervention. According to this ideology, if Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast did not integrate into the national revolution, it would become a threat to the Sandinista revolution's survival. Sandinista leaders therefore forged ahead with their program on the Coast, which included carrying out the Literacy Crusade in Spanish, rather than in the Atlantic Coast languages (Creole English and Miskitu), without considering the Coast's social, cultural, racial, and political differences. These attitudes and policies reinscribed historical colonial relations: the majority mestizo Pacific people understood the *costeños*—the Indigenous and Black people of the Caribbean Coast—as culturally lacking and devoid of political consciousness.[73] The Sandinistas' slogan, "The Atlantic Coast: An Awakening Giant," implied that with the arrival of the revolution, coastal people would "awaken" to take their place in the national revolution.

Evidence suggests that Cuban advice exacerbated the Sandinista's misguided approach to the Atlantic Coast, which in turn magnified the degree of Sandinista mistakes. In November 1980, Oscar, a functionary from the Cuban Communist Party whose last name was not disclosed, wrote to the Cuban MINCULT about strategies to incorporate the Caribbean Coast. He feared that the Sandinistas' current efforts to promote sports and cultural activities did not go far enough, and that they evidenced a lack of consciousness about the

71. Juliet Hooker, "Race and the Space of Citizenship: The Mosquito Coast and the Place of Blackness and Indigeneity in Nicaragua," in *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place*, Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 246–278; Manuel Ortega Hegg, "Problemática étnica, región y autonomía," in *Antología del pensamiento crítico nicaragüense contemporáneo, edited by Juan Pablo Gómez y Camilo Antillón*, 373–394 (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2016).

72. Juliet Hooker, "'Beloved Enemies': Race and Official Mestizo Nationalism in Nicaragua," *Latin American Research Review* 40:3 (2005): 14–39.

73. Charles Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894–1987* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994): 92–94.

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"gravity" of the situation. Oscar argued that the counterrevolution's strength on the Coast demanded a further-reaching plan that would merge socioeconomic measures with political education. Only then, with the "full reality of the region" planned for, would sports and cultural efforts be effective.[74]

Oscar divided his suggestions for the Caribbean Coast into three categories: sports exchanges, cultural exchanges, and religion. Sports fell under the purview of INDER. Oscar thought INDER could plan to have all the Cuban sports delegations that visited Nicaragua go to the Coast, that Cuba could host Nicaraguan youth sports teams, that INDER might train some sports instructors in Cuba, or send advisors to the region, and, that sports groups from the broader Caribbean region might visit the Coast—so long as visits were "politically appropriate."

Ideas for cultural strategies followed in a similar vein. Oscar suggested that Cuba might invite Nicaraguan artist delegations to the island, and follow their visit with exchange visits from Cuba's Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, Conjunto Folklórico de Oriente, or other groups whose character was "suitable to the sociocultural characteristics of the Atlantic Coast." He envisioned bolstering Sandinista TV and radio programming and organizing a festival featuring Cuban movies that promoted political objectives. Oscar also saw the potential of contracting other "progressive" Caribbean artists to go to Nicaragua, such as the Tercer Mundo of Jamaica theater group.

Oscar's suggestion to send the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional and the Conjunto Folklórico de Oriente because of their "sociocultural similarities" to the people of the Caribbean Coast reveals how Oscar, and by extension, other Cuban officials, understood the region. That is, they held the Coast as a particular space differentiated from the Pacific face of Nicaragua because of its Blackness, whose culture was "folkloric."[75] In the Cuban revolutionary context, leaders elevated Black culture through folkloric dance groups while divorcing them from religious traditions. The Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, for example, performed dances rooted in Afro-Cuban religion that leaders claimed as a Cuban national tradition, while its artists were expected to grow out of their religious beliefs.[76] Afro-Cuban religions such as Santería incorporated elements of Catholicism into rites and rituals, but religious life happened beyond Catholic supervision. Moreover, the Catholic Church's institutional weakness

74. Resumen sobre algunas ideas en relación con el trabajo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua, November 27, 1980, BJM-AGMC, Folder: Convenios Culturales 1981–82.

75. Hooker, "Race and the Space of Citizenship."

76. For a discussion of Cuba's Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, see Elizabeth Schwall, "The Footsteps of Nieves Fresneda: Cuban Folkloric Dance and Cultural Policy, 1959–1979," *Cuban Studies* 47 (2019): 35–56.

and religion's institutionalized submission to the Cuban Revolution by the late 1970s may have blinded Cuban strategists to the structure of the Moravian Church—the Caribbean Coast's foremost religious denomination—and to its centrality to politics in that region. Revolutionary paternalism that discounted religion and expected performers to transcend their beliefs may not have provoked counterrevolution in Cuba, but on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast, the Sandinistas excluded the Moravian Church from its cultural and political integration initiatives to their own peril.

By 1980, Oscar came to understand, to some degree, the importance of religion to Caribbean Coast residents and strategized to harness it to support the Sandinistas. He proposed to send some religious Cuban leaders and others from the Caribbean who held appropriately revolutionary political stances, but they [Cuban leaders] would have to find some sort of justification. They could distribute the magazine *Caribbean Contact*, the organ of the Council of Caribbean Churches, which he found in general promoted "very progressive positions." Oscar also suggested that the Cubans might think about how they could use the Council of Caribbean Churches to further their political objectives in Nicaragua. However, even if these exchanges actually occurred, they failed to win Indigenous Moravian leaders' support for the revolution. Instead, beginning in 1981, Miskitu leaders leveraged religion to mobilize against the Sandinista state.[77]

Oscar's brainstorm to strengthen the Caribbean Coast's connection to, and support for, the Sandinista revolution illuminates a key tactic of Cuban leaders: to base collaboration on expert strategists. It shows the levels of influence Cuba had—or thought it had—and what level of support leaders understood as possible. Sending Cuban experts abroad and bringing "students" to Cuba constituted a main strategy for integration. Oscar's document evidences that Cuban leaders thought they knew how to politicize culture and sports, and that they could teach cultural politicization, too. While it is unclear what the Ministry of Culture did with the report, sports and cultural exchanges constituted primary vectors of collaboration between Cuba and Nicaragua.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Oscar's proposals is that he thought it possible for Cuba to leverage solidarity with other Caribbean governments to help efforts in Nicaragua. While Cuban expertise and exchanges would lead efforts to win the hearts and minds of people who lived on the Coast, other Caribbean connections might also be important. Many Caribbean Coast

77. Susan Hawley, "Protestantism and Indigenous Mobilization: The Moravian Church among the Miskitu Indians of Nicaragua," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29 (1997): 111–129.

residents rejected Cubans as communist enemies.[78] Bluefields residents held a protest against Cuban literacy workers in September 1980—several months before Oscar wrote his memo.[79] His suggestions acknowledged that the Coast's greater identification with other sectors of the Caribbean—namely, the English-speaking, formerly British Caribbean, and its lesser connection with Cuba and the Pacific region of Nicaragua. Oscar worried that costeños might be more receptive to the work and presence of artists and religious people from Trinidad, Jamaica, and Grenada than Cubans. Of course, any Caribbean religious groups and artists contracted by Cuba to go to Nicaragua would have to promote Cuban and Sandinista political ideology and cultural integration.

Oscar's proposal for the Caribbean Coast raises the question of how much the Cubans shaped the Sandinistas' integration strategies more broadly. It is possible that the Cubans guided the Sandinistas' response to Miskitu demands for land and autonomy, which they formally channeled through their mass organization, MISURASATA (Miskitus, Sumos, Ramas, and Sandinistas *todos unidos*–"all together"), at the beginning of 1981. The FSLN reacted with arrests, and the conflict between the revolutionary government and the Miskitu escalated over the course of the year. In December, a series of violent confrontations known as "Navidad Roja" (Red Christmas) broke out between the FLSN and the Miskitu along the Río Coco. As a result, the Sandinista government forcibly relocated 42 villages—approximately 8,500 Miskitu—to inland camps under the guise of protection from counterrevolutionary attacks.

If Cubans were advising Sandinista state security, it stands to reason that they would advise action to move against movements for autonomy. But the FSLN might have pursued a misguided policy towards the Miskitu regardless of Cuban advice, in order to confront growing threats of foreign intervention, which at this point came from Honduras and Argentina.[80] The question of Cuban involvement in Sandinista policy toward the Caribbean Coast suggests that the Sandinista-Indigenous conflict should be understood through an international perspective, alongside that of civil war.[81]

In late 1984, the Sandinistas agreed to enter into negotiations for the Caribbean Coast's autonomy. After more than three years of civil war, peace without a new political arrangement proved impossible, and violence continued through

78. Philippe Bourgois and Jorge Grunburg, *La Mosquita y la Revolución: informe de una investigación rural en la Costa Atlántica Norte 1980* (Managua: CIDCA,1980).

79. "Protesta anticubana paraliza Bluefields," *La Prensa*, October 1, 1980.

80. Mateo Jarquín, "Red Christmases: The Sandinistas, Indigenous Rebellion, and the Origins of the Nicaraguan Civil War, 1981–82," *Cold War History* 18:1 (2018): 102–105. Conflict between the Miskitu and FSLN began before the Reagan administration approved covert CIA action in 1981.

81. See Jarquín's contribution to this dossier about regional responses to the Sandinista revolution.

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1988. The Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA, Center for Research and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast), an organization that supported applied social science research, became an important conduit between the FSLN and Miskitu communities. As part of the Cuban-Nicaraguan cultural collaboration for 1985, Cuba sent a person to advise CIDCA for a year, as well as a team of researchers assigned to collaborate in "developing" the Coast.[82] In return, Nicaragua would send a delegation of five people from CIDCA to Cuba "for training" over the course of three months.

Interestingly, anthropologist Charles Hale worked as a researcher affiliated with CIDCA Bluefields in 1985 but does not remember any Cuban advisors.[83] It could be that the Cuban assigned there worked at the Managua office, or that this element of the agreement fell through. Hale does remember being aware of the Cuban presence on the Caribbean Coast and having the sense that they advised on security issues. Importantly, he noted that the CIDCA researchers felt that Cuban revolutionary leaders' insistence that the Cuban Revolution had eradicated racism handicapped Cuban advisors' ability to confront racial conflict.[84] Because of this perceived lack of expertise, Cubans likely were not involved on the ground in the autonomy negotiation process. CIDCA members went on study missions to Scandinavia and the Soviet Union to consider other examples, and the Sandinistas looked instead to Mexico and Colombia for guidance on autonomy.[85]

The Caribbean Coast situation highlights the practical difficulties of internationalist revolutionary diplomacy and the differences between the two revolutionary states. While the Sandinista revolution's endurance remained a shared priority, both the Cuban and Sandinista revolutions contended with different national contexts, as the former struggled into its third decade and the latter sought consolidation of its more recent victory.

## CONCLUSION

This article examined collaboration between Cuba's and Nicaragua's Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministries of Culture. By tracing paths of expertise and both ideological and practical instances of advising, it demonstrated that Cubans were

82. Protocolo de Colaboración Cultural, 1–2.
83. Charles Hale, interview with author, July 30, 2020.
84. See Devyn Spence Benson, *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
85. Charles Hale interview, July 30, 2020.

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intimately involved in the Sandinistas' revolutionary process. The internal dynamics of these ministries and how each worked with its counterpart illuminate the mechanics of revolution and contestations therein. Cultural and government exchanges relied on human actors, whose experiences reveal grassroots perspectives and the day-to-day aspects of revolutionary projects. In theory, the Cuban model would guide the Sandinista revolution's consolidation and furnish the experts to guide the process. In reality, the Cuban-Nicaraguan revolutionary relationship was layered, and at times contradictory.

The Sandinistas accepted Cuban expertise and assistance, which were essential for their state-building and defense programs in the midst of US-backed counterrevolution. Yet Cuban advice likely contributed to tensions within Nicaragua, especially regarding questions about how to incorporate the Caribbean Coast into the Sandinista revolution. The Cuban approach, which hinged on national unity and employing culture as a mechanism of control, could not pivot to respond to the nuances and demands of Indigenous and Black politics. Perhaps as a result, the Sandinistas strove to downplay the breadth of Cuban presence in revolutionary projects and structures in order to avoid yoking their revolution's future completely to Cuba's. As other articles in this special issue illustrate, this allowed the Sandinistas to continue engaging in diplomatic relations and forging solidarity with other states, particularly in Latin America and Western Europe. Although they sought to cultivate a foreign policy that did not rely solely on the Cubans, it is unclear that the Sandinistas would have been able to consolidate their government as quickly or effectively, or build a military apparatus capable of sustaining prolonged civil war, without Cuban support.

In the immediate aftermath of the Nicaraguan Revolution, Cuban leaders sent professional and political collaborators to advise the Sandinistas in governmental organization as one strategy in their larger internationalism playbook. In many ways, they were pivotal to the building of the FSLN's revolutionary state. In turn, Nicaragua offered an external revolution on which Cuba could stake its own legacy and harness as ally against the United States. Collaboration allowed Cuba to employ its excess of skilled workers and simultaneously radicalize a younger generation.

Following the multiple levels of Cuban-Nicaraguan collaboration through their Ministries of Culture and Foreign Relations contributes to studies of the international dimensions of the Sandinista and Cuban revolutions. It shows that paying attention to day-to-day encounters and mishaps within foreign policy and collaboration projects offers insight into the lived experience of revolution, diplomacy, and internationalism. Blending intentions and official

agreements with the insights of everyday interactions complicates understandings of an alliance founded on shared ideology and revolutionary impulses. This approach suggests that writing the history of Nicaraguan-Cuban foreign relations remains incomplete without these perspectives and that revolutionary state-making involved a wide range of participants—from ministers to bathroom attendants—and a multitude of collaborators in between.

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